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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested in previous literature that the wife's employment status has both positive and negative influences on marital interaction and companionship. The differences in findings and hypotheses can be interpreted by either the theory of role strain or the theory of role accumulation. The purpose of this investigation is to determine which of these theories best approximates the influence of the working status of the wife on marital companionship roles. The data were collected by means of a stratified area probability sample of upper-middle class intact households in a Southeastern city in 1973. There were 233 wives included in the investigation. The work patterns were divided into household, professional-managerial, and clerical as well as part-time and full-time. Leisure participation rates were determined by the proportion of time spent in individual, parallel, and joint activities with the spouse and with others. The results support the role accumulation theory at lower levels of role expansion. Marital companionship is generally higher among the employed wives when children are not present in the home. Support for role strain theory emerges at increasing levels of role accumulation, most notably when children enter the home. (Author)

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LEISURE, COMPANIONSHIP AND THE WORKING WIFE

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LEISURE, COMPANIONSHIP AND THE WORKING WIFE

Women in the United States have experienced relatively rapid gains in labor force participation. It is projected that the female labor force for 1975 will approach 36 million, an increase of over 50 percent in the past decade (Rosenblum, 1972). The most rapid increases have been experienced by married women, of which approximately 43 percent were employed in 1970 compared to 33 percent in 1960 and 22 percent in 1950 (Blake, 1974).

Paralleling these changes in the work participation of wives has been a restructuring of the marital dyad toward a more equalitarian form, especially in the middle class. This has been variously described as the movement toward a "companionship" (Burgess and Locke, 1945) or "colleague" (Farber, 1964) relationship. While the "institutional" or traditional marriage depended upon a sexual division of labor and a minimum of shared intra-spouse activity during discretionary time, the companionate marriage has stressed an openness to altering traditional sex-role expectations and the sharing of leisure to facilitate a sense of interpersonal affinity.

It appears that these two trends are somewhat competitive. If the wife is employed, then she has access to resources allowing her more independence from her husband and correspondingly less time to share leisure activities, thereby reducing companionship. Alternately, labor force participation may increase companionship experiences because employment accords privileges and ego gratification encouraging greater husband-wife interaction in household tasks and discretionary time. On the one hand, labor force participation of the wife is predicted to increase stress and reduce companionship in the family while on the other hand, it is predicted that stress will be reduced and companionship

increased by the employment of the wife. The present investigation attemps to examine the marital companionship experiences of three categories of working wives to aid in determining which of the above approaches most represents what is occurring in the family.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research on the companionship in leisure of husbands and wives according to the employment status of the wife has been limited and inconclusive. Most of the available literature is concerned with the influence of the wife's employment on subjective appraisals of marital adjustment of happiness (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Axelson, 1963; Nye, 1963; Blood, 1963; Orden and Bradburn, 1969; Axelson, 1970). With regard to differences in actual leisure participation, Nye (1963) found that employed mothers maintain lower amounts of non-familial leisure interaction but participated in family leisure at about the same rate as nonemployed mothers. Yarrow (1959) reported that evening and weekend recreational patterns of mothers were little influenced by employment status. The primary differences existed in daytime recreational pursuits, limiting the contacts with peer groups of the working mother. Orthner (1974a) found that the relationship between joint sharing of leisure time and the sharing of household tasks with the spouse was statistically significant for employed wives but not for nonemployed wives.

Considering perceptions of companionship, Orden and Bradburn (1969) reported a higher degree of perceived marital companionship in leisure among the employed wives with the greatest differences existing in the higher income families. Carlson (1973) found that employed mothers are more likely to indicate a desire for more recreation than they presently have with their family. Since the actual amounts of recreation are similar, Nye (1974a) suggests that mothers who are not tied to their home and family all day may be more likely to appreciate and welcome recreational interaction with their families. Both Nye (1963) and

Orden and Bradburn (1969) reported that part-time employed wives experience more companionship activities with their spouse compared to full-time employed wives. Therefore, the extent of commitment to the occupational roles may also be an important factor to consider in additional research.

There are several apparent weaknesses in the above studies. First, most of these studies have utilized rather restricted measures of actual companionship in leisure, either attitudes or perceptions of participation in a limited number of potential leisure pursuits are considered as indicators of companionship. Second, while the extent of employment has been considered to some degree, none of the above consider the type of employment or occupation of the wife. Third, most of the available research has not been linked to any theoretical framework out of which hypotheses have been tested. This has limited the applicability of the findings to other situations and slowed the development of family-related theory.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

It has become increasingly apparent that earlier claims of a decline in the recreational function of the family (Ogburn, 1934) have not materialized. Recent research has demonstrated that family recreation roles have in fact become rather well institutionalized for both husbands and wives (Kelly, 1972; Nye, 1974a). But the increase in recreational role expectations has the potential for placing strain on persons with greater occupational role demands, especially if other role expectations are not significantly reduced.

Goode (1960) has postulated that multiple relationships with diverse role partners can lead to inadequate or stressful role performance. This theory of "role strain" indicates that stress can occur either because role obligations increase over time causing a selection of particular roles at the expense of others or because of discrepant expectations of roles which may be called upon

at the same time. Role strain is viewed by Goode as normal process in role relations but usually accompanied by social instability and personal stress.

A recent criticism of this theory has been posited by Sieber (1974) under the theory of role accumulation. Sieber proposes that additional roles may lead to stress but that the effect of this can often be outweighed by the gratification that accrue to the person for multiple role performance. These positive effects include increases in role privileges, greater status security, enhanced resources for status and role performance, and enrichment of the personality and ego gratification.

These two approaches lead to quite different hypotheses regarding the influence of the work status of the wife on marital companionship. This is especially true when one considers that it remains in most families the responsibility of the wife to see that household tasks and childrearing roles are properly carried out. Husbands of working wives are somewhat more likely to be perceived as "helping out" in these roles, (cf. Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970) but this still remains largely the domain of the wife-mother. Some reduction in potential role strain can be seen in the degree of role commitment to household tasks on the part of employed wives. Vanek (1974), through a national study of time-budgets, reported that the number of hours devoted to household work among nonemployed women has remained remarkably stable over the past 50 years. But for those having outside employment, the number of hours spent in housework is now less than half that of the homemaker sample. Even when socioeconomic status and family composition were controlled, most the difference remained. Interestingly, she found that employed women made no greater use of paid help than women who were not employed and husbands aided in household tasks about the same for both groups, only a few hours per week.

An area that has not been adequately covered in previous research is the degree of salience of the occupational roles of the wife for marital companionship. It can be expected that if the occupation fulfills certain needs for control over or respect and prestige from persons outside the family, this may relieve some of the pressure for adult contact and support through recreational roles with the spouse, thereby reducing potential role strain.

Another variable important to any analysis of companionship roles is the measure of leisure participation. It has been demonstrated by Orthner (1974b) that the sharing of leisure activities by husbands and wives must be subdivided according to the degree of interaction required in the activities themselves. It is not sufficient to merely examine "shared" activities or activities participated in together. Leisure activities with required interaction, joint activities, were found to have significantly different consequences for marital satisfaction than those activities with reduced or little interaction, parallel activities (Orthner, 1975). Given this finding, it is suggested that joint leisure activities provide the greatest indication of marital companionship followed by parallel activities with individual activities giving the least indication of companionship in marriage.

It appears that a line of reasoning can be developed to support either role strain or role accumulation theory in the case of companionship roles among employed and nonemployed wives. In terms of a hierarchy of role demands or commitments, it seems that occupational, household, and parental responsibilities are less voluntary and take precedence over recreational roles. Therefore, proportionate participation in joint marital recreation roles should be lower among those employed, especially if they are full time in the labor market and in higher salience occupations. Parenthood would attenuate the potential for role strain among the employed.

From another point of view, there are privileges that accrue to the wife employed in the labor market that may balance the scale toward companionship. It has been demonstrated that she is able to reduce her commitments to household tasks compared to the wife working in the home market. The wife employed in the labor market, especially in higher salience occupations, may perceive a greater sense of status in relation to her husband, fulfill needs for personality enrichment outside the family, and develop more equalitarian expectations in her spouse functional to the maintenance of companionship. Axelson (1970) found that husbands of employed wives are more likely to perceive their wives as companions indicating that the process does operate in both directions. These factors suggest that while the potential for leisure time may be lower among the employed wives, this does not necessarily result in the proportion of available time allocated to companionate marital roles being less.

Because of the unconclusiveness of previous research and the alternate suggestions of the two theories under consideration, the following hypothesis is to be examined in the present investigation:

> There are no differences in the proportionate use of leisure time among professional-managerial, clerical-sales, or household working wives.

Controls on the length of the workweek of the employed wives and the period of the family life cycle are to be entered into the study.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The data for this investigation were collected as part of a larger study of the recreational roles of husbands and wives in a moderately sized Southeastern city in the Spring of 1973. A stratified area probability sampling design was employed on a population of nonstudent, intact, upper-middle class households.

After pretesting, a structured questionnaire was introduced separately to husbands and wives in the sample. Of the 317 qualified couples, 228 wives completed usable questionnaires, a response rate of 73 percent. Insufficient information on occupation or the indication that the sampled leisure time period was atypical for that family resulted in 220 respondents for the present investigation.

To measure marital companionship, each respondent was required to list the number of hours spent alone, with their spouse and perhaps others, or with person(s) other than their spouse in any of 96 possible activities. The list was exhaustive and served to remind the subjects of previous behavior. The weekend period was selected for the time sampling because it tends to be the most family oriented and also most subject to immediate recall. The list of activities had been previously submitted to a panel of judges who determined the placement of an activity in either parallel or joint categories, given the definitions provided earlier. Any activity hours spent alone were coded as individual while those shared with others were coded parallel or joint depending on the judges determination of its interactional requirements. For example, game playing, visiting friends, or engaging in sexual or affectional activity were judged to be joint while attending church, watching T.V. or listening to records were judged to be parallel.

The present investigation is concerned with the proportionate distribution of activity hours in individual, parallel with spouse, or joint with spouse activities as a measure of the degree of companionship actually, rather than perceptually, experienced by the wives in the sample. Exclusively husband-wife companionship should not be inferred in parallel and joint activities as additional persons, such as children or friends may also be co-participants.

It is assumed for the purposes of this study that wives who are employed in the labor market and those in the home market are working wives. Employed

wives were divided into those working in professional or managerial positions and those working in clerical or sales positions. This breakdown resulted in 23.2 percent of the sample in professional-managerial and 20.0 percent in clerical-sales positions while 56.8 percent were working in the home market. The employed wives are assumed to be working out of choice rather than necessity because of the upper-middle class nature of the sample.

FINDINGS

The data initially indicate that the work status of the wife is only marginally related to companionship with the spouse in leisure. The hypothesis cannot be rejected because the proportionate distributions reported in Table I indicate no significant differences in leisure participation across the various categories of labor force participation. It should be noted, nevertheless, that

--Place Table I About Here--

the highest companionship experiences are reported by the professional-managerial and home working wives, while low companionship, parallel activities, are more common for the clerical-sales working wives. This is especially noteworthy when the ratio of joint to parallel activities is examined. This provides some indication as to how time that is shared with the spouse is used to promote companionship experiences as opposed to merely being in the same place together. Among the professional-managerial wives, the proportion of time spent in joint activities is significantly greater than that spent in parallel activities ($t=3.01$, $p < .01$). This difference, while not as great, is also found in the home working wives ($t=3.53$, $p < .01$). The clerical-sales working wives maintain the same proportions for both joint and parallel activities. The slightly higher participation in individual activities among the employed wives probably results from

the compensatory function of individual activities in helping to adjust from one set of role expectations to another.

The data were then controlled on the part-time or full-time work status of the employed wives. It is assumed for the purposes of comparison that non-employed wives are full time in the home labor market. Part time is defined as working from 5 to 30 hours per week and this represented the situation of 17.7 percent of the sample. Persons working more than 30 hours comprise 24.6 percent of the sample and are classified as full time. Table 2 gives the proportionate distributions of leisure activity hours among these sub-samples.

--Place Table 2 About Here--

It is apparent that control on length of the work week reveals further differences in the work status of wives and supports some of the findings reported above. The only statistically significant finding in joint-spouse activities is that full-time professional-managerial wives maintained higher companionship experiences than part-time clerical-sales wives. Of some interest, however, is the significantly lower low-companionship, parallel-spouse participation among the part-time professional-managerial wives which is balanced by a significantly higher proportion of time spent on individual activities by these same wives. This seems to run counter to the idea that the ideal work situation for the wife is one in which she is able to meet employment needs part time in a higher salience occupation yet still meet obligations in the home. While this may be simply a sampling problem, it might also indicate that the wife employed part time in an occupation which requires some higher level of competence and skill has to spend a greater proportion of her discretionary time in preparation or study to maintain her occupational role expectations. However, this does not appear to result in a decline in companionship among these wives. The ratio of joint- to parallel-spouse activities among the professional-managerial and home working wives is

also found among the full-time respondents with the clerical-sales wives once again demonstrating lower proportions of joint-spouse activities and an equal joint to parallel-spouse leisure activity ratio.

The most revealing differences in companionate leisure activities occur when stage of the family life cycle is controlled. The respondents were divided into those that were childless (10.5 percent), those in which the youngest child is under 12 years of age (53.2 percent), those in which the youngest child is between the ages of 12 and 19 (20.9 percent), and those in the post parental period (15.5 percent). The proportion of respondents employed outside the home is highest in the childless period (70 percent) dropping to 35.0 percent in the young child period and 54.4 percent in the older child period. The employment rate of 38.2 percent in the post parental period can be partially explained by the lower occupational involvement of earlier female cohorts with more traditional homemaker role expectations and reduced occupational skills. Table 3 provides the distribution of proportions on the leisure activity dimension among the work status categories when the life cycle periods are controlled.

--Place Table 3 About Here--

Among the wives that are childless, it is readily apparent that husband-wife companionship is higher among those employed in the labor market compared to the wives in the home market. The differences between the professional-managerial wives and clerical-sales wives are not significant but the home working wives maintain a lower proportion of time in joint-spouse and a higher proportion in parallel-spouse activities than both categories of employed wives. Another major difference is in the use of non-spouse leisure activities among the employed and nonemployed wives. The higher individual participation among the employed wives conforms to the compensatory hypothesis proposed earlier in which there may be

needs to adjust to contrasting role expectations, expecially if the family roles are new to the wife. The home working wives appear to compensate more through contacts with persons other than the spouse, perhaps because they do not receive the adult stimulation from others provided by employment.

During the childrearing years a quite different pattern emerges. Marital companionship is highest among those wives that are not employed during the periods with both young and older children. This is true whether one uses the measure of the highest proportion of time spent in joint-spouse activities or the ratio of joint to parallel-spouse activities. The professional-managerial wives still maintain higher proportions of joint-spouse activities compared to the clerical-sales wives but not as high as wives who are not employed. The early childrearing years, nevertheless, are marked by greater differences than the later childrearing years. Individual activities, for example, are participated in more by the employed wives in the early period but in the later period there are no substantial differences.

The post parental period again indicates a different pattern of leisure and companionship activities. The professional-managerial wives demonstrate the highest proportion of joint-spouse activities followed by the clerical-sales wives with the home working wives reporting the lowerst proportion of these higher companionship activities. The positive ratio of joint to parallel-spouse activities among the professional-managerial wives maintains itself while the nonemployed wives exhibit a balance between joint and parallel-spouse activities. This is in contrast to the parenting years when a positive ratio existed. The higher individual activity participation on the part of the nonemployed wives is somewhat the reverse of the respondents in the earlier years of marriage. This might indicate that the potential role conflict of the employed wives has now been reduced while the home working wives are having to fill weekend hours which were previously devoted to family and child responsibilities.

Overall, the family life cycle data suggest that companionship roles are maintained at a fairly high level among those wives employed in professional-managerial occupations but the childrearing years reduce somewhat the joint-spouse participation rates of these wives. Wives employed in clerical-sales positions do not appear to maintain as high a rate of marital companionship as the professional-managerial wives and are even more reduced in their companionship roles during the childrearing years. Wives who are not employed report lower proportions of companionship experiences in leisure than both the employed groups during the childless and post-parental periods but higher proportions of companionship in leisure during the childrearing years. The proportion of time spent in individual activities was found to increase steadily over the life cycle for the nonemployed wives in contrast to the employed wives.

CONCLUSIONS

The data do not clearly support either the theory of role strain (Goode, 1960) or the theory of role accumulation (Sieber, 1974) with regard to influences on marital recreation and companionship roles. The evidence, however, does suggest that the hypothsis of no difference between the home and labor market working wives can be rejected when controls on part time/full time employment and period of the family life cycle are controlled.

Support for the role accumulation theory can be seen in the higher proportions of marital companionship activities found among those wives employed in professional-managerial compared to clerical-sales positions. If we assume that the occupational roles of the former are more demanding, yet more rewarding, it follows that they also provide the opportunity for greater privileges and more understanding on the part of the husband. Further support for this approach can be found when we consider the childless and post-parental marriages. Higher companionship experiences are reported among both employed groups compared

to the nonemployed indicating reduced strain despite the presence of more competing roles. It is interesting to note that the nonemployed childless wives reported comparatively low joint-spouse activity rates and high parallel-spouse activity rates when an earlier study found evidence that this pattern was significantly related to marital dissatisfaction among wives in the first years of marriage (Orthner, 1975). This suggests that role accumulation may indeed have positive consequences during periods when role commitments are reduced, especially if this condition is associated with few challenging responsibilities.

Support for the theory of role strain is also evident in this investigation. Employed wives are more likely to participate in individual activities compared to nonemployed wives and this may be linked to the conflict that exists between the occupational, household, and family roles. A way of dealing with this strain can be found in individual activities as they provide compensation and relaxation from the demands of competing roles. This was found to be especially true among the childless wives who are developing their marital and family roles and the wives with young children who must accommodate demanding parental roles as well. Further support for the theory of role strain is seen in the reduction in joint companionship activities during the childrearing years among the employed wives. This is esepcially true of the clerical-sales wives whose lower salience occupational roles do not provide the status or privileges for which role accumulation may compensate. Once the conflict in roles subsides, after the children have been launched, then the employed wives demonstrate once again a rise in companionship roles.

In general, this investigation supports the position that marital companionship, as evidenced by co-participation in recreational roles, is a relatively high priority role in the family. It would have been easy for employed wives, especially those who are mothers, to reduce significantly the proportion of time

that they allocate to their spouses in joint activities. Despite the differences that did appear between the employed and nonemployed wives, the consistently high proportions of time spent in leisure activities with the spouse maintains itself from category to category. This suggests that while the occupational roles of the wife are important to consider, there remain underlying commitments in the family today to share discretionary time with one another. These commitments to companionship may be less voluntary than we had earlier anticipated.

In conclusion, these data suggest that there are potential stresses placed on the family by the employment of the wife but the positive contributions for the married pair often outweigh the stresses. As the propostion of wives employed in the labor market continues to mount it would be helpful to better determine how much role strain can be handled in a family, and still have it maintain mechanisms for conflict and strain resolution. There is also the matter of role replacement through household help, day care, or cooperative living arrangements and their influence on role strain and companionship to be considered.

Future research needs to explore the husband's role in this process so as to determine how his functions increase or retard potential role strain. Further breakdowns in the employment status of the wife categories also need to be attempted. Limitations in the size of the present sample precluded this in the present investigation. The measure of leisure participation has been shown to be of considerable value in our understanding of companionship roles. Removing the study of companionship from perceptions to actual behavior could also be a step forward in our understanding of husband-wife relationships.

TABLE 1: PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT IN VARIOUS LEISURE ACTIVITY PATTERNS ACCORDING TO THE WORK STATUS OF THE WIFE

Leisure Activity Patterns	Wives Working Status		
	Professional-Managerial (N=51)	Clerical-Sales (N=44)	Home (N=125)
Individual	.38	.38	.35
Joint-Spouse	.32	.27	.33
Parallel-Spouse	.21	.27	.25
Shared W/Others	.09	.08	.07

TABLE 2: PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT IN VARIOUS LEISURE ACTIVITY PATTERNS ACCORDING TO THE WORK STATUS OF THE WIFE, WHEN PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT ARE CONTROLLED

Leisure Activity Patterns	Wives Working Status				
	Part-Time		Full-Time		
	Professional-Managerial (N=16)	Clerical-Sales (N=23)	Professional-Managerial (N=33)	Clerical-Sales (N=21)	Home (N=125)
Individual	.48	.37	.33	.39	.35
Joint-Spouse	.28	.27	.35	.27	.33
Parallel-Spouse	.14	.27	.23	.27	.25
Shared W/Others	.10	.09	.09	.07	.07

TABLE 3: PROPORTION OF THE TIME SPENT IN VARIOUS LEISURE ACTIVITY PATTERNS ACCORDING TO THE WORK STATUS OF THE WIFE, WHEN PERIOD OF THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE IS CONTROLLED

Leisure Activity Patterns	Wives Working Status		
	Professional-Managerial	Clerical-Sales	Home
Childless Wives:			
	(N=9)	(N=7)	(N=7)
Individual	.35	.41	.26
Joint-Spouse	.36	.34	.25
Parallel-Spouse	.26	.24	.39
Shared W/Others	.03	.01	.10
Wives with Young Children:			
	(N=27)	(N=14)	(N=76)
Individual	.41	.38	.31
Joint-Spouse	.32	.24	.36
Parallel-Spouse	.17	.30	.26
Shared W/Others	.10	.08	.07
Wives with Older Children:			
	(N=10)	(N=15)	(N=21)
Individual	.38	.42	.40
Joint-Spouse	.30	.26	.33
Parallel-Spouse	.22	.20	.23
Shared W/Others	.10	.12	.04
Post-Parental Wives:			
	(N=5)	(N=8)	(N=21)
Individual	.29	.29	.43
Joint-Spouse	.35	.29	.25
Parallel-Spouse	.29	.39	.25
Shared W/Others	.07	.03	.07

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